

Message Text

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47

ACTION NEA-09

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CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7400

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T LONDON 00841

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MU, UK, US

SUBJECT: PRESS REPORTS OF TOW MISSILE SALES AND USG
REQUEST TO USE MASIRAH ISLAND

REF: STATE 11531, BEIRUT 764, STATE 12813,

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. SEVERAL LONDON PAPERS CARRIED
STORIES SATURDAY JANUARY 18 ON US SALES OF TOW ANTI-TANK
MISSILES AS RESULT OF DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING NOON
FRIDAY. STORIES TENDED TO CONCENTRATE ON TOWS FOR
LEBANON, BUT INCLUDED TOWS FOR OMAN. THERE WAS CONFU-
SION AS TO NUMBERS (GENERALLY PUTTING THEM HIGHER THAN
IS THE CASE), AND SOME LOOSE TALK OF "AMERICAN SERVICE-
MEN BEING SENT TO OMAN."

2. SUNDAY TIMES AND THE OBSERVER CARRIED STORIES
JANUARY 19 ON US USE OF MASIRAH ISLAND, NOTING PAREN-
THETICALLY UNPUBLISHED BRITISH AGREEMENT WITH SULTAN OF
OMAN FOR USE OF THAT BASE DATING FROM 1958. SUNDAY TIMES
REPORT IS BY FAR THE FULLER, AND QUOTES OMANI FOREIGN
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MINISTER ZAWAWI AS SAYING USG HAS ASKED FOR THE RIGHT TO

OCCASIONAL USE OF THE MASIRAH (BRITISH) BASE. US WANTS REFUELING FACILITIES FOR MILITARY AIRCRAFT. OMAN'S ANSWER HAS NOT YET BEEN GIVEN, BUT IN VIEW OF GOOD RELATIONS WITH USG, MR. ZAWAWI SEES NO PROBLEM.

3. SUNDAY TIMES REPORT SPECULATES THAT SOME OF SULTAN'S FELLOW ARABS MAY SEE PROBLEM, IN VIEW OF SECRETARY KISSINGER'S BUSINESS WEEK INTERVIEW. HOWEVER, ZAWAWI IS NOTED AS HAVING SAID ON JANUARY 19: "IF THE UNITED STATES EVER SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED USING FORCE AGAINST THE OIL PRODUCERS, IT WOULD NOT NEED MASIRAH TO MAKE THAT POSSIBLE." ARTICLE NOTES US FORCES IN INDIAN OCEAN "ALREADY INCLUDE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS ENTERPRISE." REPORT NOTES "AMERICAN NAVAL BASE IN THE GULF" AT BAHREIN, AND SAYS MASIRAH WOULD GIVE US "ITS FIRST AIR-BASE IN THE AREA."

4. SUNDAY TIMES REPORT SAYS BRITISH ARE FAR FROM HAPPY AT US REQUEST. ZAWAWI WOULD NOT COMMENT ON BRITISH ATTITUDE, BUT HE DID CONFIRM THAT HE HAS BEEN DISCUSSING WITH BRITISH WHAT RESPONSE SHOULD BE MADE TO USG. ZAWAWI REPORTEDLY SAID HE AND THE SULTAN WOULD REMAIN IN UK FOR "PERHAPS ANOTHER THREE OR FOUR DAYS," AND IT WAS LIKELY THAT OMANI-BRITISH RESPONSE TO USG WOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN BY THEN. END UNCLASSIFIED.

5. BEGIN SECRET. ZAWAWI CHECKED WITH EMBOFF LAMBRAKIS ON JANUARY 19 BEFORE AGREEING TO INTERVIEW WITH SUNDAY TIMES EDITOR JOHN BARRY (WHO, WITH JOHN BONAR IN BEIRUT, AND STEPHEN ARIS IN NEW YORK, HAS BY-LINED THIS ARTICLE). EMBOFF INFORMED ZAWAWI OF WHAT STATE PRESS BRIEFING OFFICER HAD SAID ON THE SUBJECT JANUARY 18 (STATE 12396). ZAWAWI HAD INDICATED HE WOULD TRY TO AVOID GIVING INTERVIEW TO BARRY, THOUGH HE ALSO SHOWED SOME CONCERN OVER FACT STORY WAS LEAKING. HOWEVER, ZAWAWI WAS OTHERWISE RELAXED, IN GOOD HUMOR, AND WILLING TO PLAY THE STORY ACCORDING TO USG WISHES. AS WE SEE IT, ZAWAWI WOULD LIKE MATTER TO BE DECIDED QUICKLY, TO AVOID ANY PRESSURES BUILDING UP. FCO'S ACTING MIDDLE EAST DEPARTMENT HEAD TOLD US MORNING JANUARY 20
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THAT HE TOO WAS PRESSING FOR EARLY BRITISH (FAVORABLE) REPLY, EVEN IF IT HAD TO BE CONDITIONED ON LATER WORKING OUT DETAILS OF LOGISTICAL SUPPLY ARRANGEMENTS. HE SAID BRITISH HAVE ARRIVED AT SAME CONCLUSION AS THIS EMBASSY, THAT PUBLIC MENTION OF 1949 US-UK AGREEMENT MIGHT ONLY MUDDY THE WATERS AT THIS STAGE. HOWEVER, BRITISH POSITION IS STILL BEING WORKED OUT AND WILL BE AVAILABLE LATER. WE URGE DEPARTMENT MOVE FAST TO GET REPLIES TO

BRITISH TECHNICAL QUERIES (JUST AS WE HOPE BRITISH WILL
PROVIDE SPEEDY REPLY TO USG QUERY) SO AS TO AVOID UN-
NECESSARY PRESS SPECULATION IN THIS FAST-BREAKING STORY.
ZAWAWI TELLS US SULTAN PLANS TO FLY TO MUSCAT JANUARY 24.

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